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I. LAND AND PEOPLE

1. The Co-operative Republic of Guyana, which has been an independent nation since 1966, is located on the north-eastern coast of South America. It is bounded on the north by the Atlantic Ocean, to the south by the Federative Republic of Brazil, to the east by the Republic of Suriname and to the west by the Republic of Venezuela.

2. Guyana possesses a territory of 83,000 square miles (approx. 215,000 km^2) the majority of which is dense tropical forests. Approximately 90 per cent of the population is concentrated along the Atlantic coast where most of the country's agricultural production is done.

3. During the seventeenth century the first Dutch settlers arrived and were later followed by the British. In 1815 the British won sovereign rights over the territory which later became known as British Guiana. It remained under British rule until 1966 when it was declared an independent nation within the Commonwealth and on 23 February 1970 became a Republic.

4. In 1980, the country was divided geographically into 10 Administrative Regions. Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 are on the coastal plains, while Regions 7, 8, 9 and 10 are located in the hinterland area. Region 4 includes the capital city and ranks with Regions 5 and 6 as the most populated.

Population

5. It is believed that the indigenous population first settled in the territory in 1200. Around 1640 Africans were brought in as slave labour to work the sugar plantations, while 1835 saw the arrival of Portuguese labourers. In 1838 the Indian indentured labourers arrived to be followed by the Chinese in 1853.

6. Guyana's history as a colony has crafted its present multiethnic population with intermarriages between the different races. The country is often called the "land of six peoples" but the dominant races are East Indian (48.3 per cent) and African (32.7 per cent). Amerindians are 6.3 per cent, Mixed 12.2 per cent and Portuguese, Chinese and others 0.5 per cent. According to a 1980 census, 42 per cent of those stating a religious affiliation were Christians, 32 per cent Hindu and 8 per cent Muslim.

7. The East Indian population is spread along the coastal belt, between Regions 2 and 6. Approximately 34.3 per cent reside in Region 4, 30.1 per cent in Region 6 and 19.0 per cent in Region 3. The African (Black) population is concentrated primarily in Region 4. This accounts for 56 per cent of the Black population with other major concentrations in Regions 6 and 10. The Amerindians occupy mostly Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. Approximately 29.4 per cent of the Amerindians are located in Region 9 while 22.7 per cent are in Region 1 and 20.9 per cent are in Regions 7 and 8.

8. In spite of its multiethnicity, Guyana has over the years seen comparatively few clashes between the races, with the exception of course of the politically motivated race riots of 1962-1963.

9. Guyana's population was estimated at 723,827 in 1991 as compared with 759,000 at the end of 1980. At the end of 1994, this figure was 739,553. The drop in the population growth rate has been attributed to several factors, among them the high level of migration and a decline in the fertility rate.

Socio-economic and cultural indicators

Per capita GDP	-	US$ 595.0 (1994)
Per capita GNP	-	US$ 487.0 (1994)
GNP at factor cost (US$m)	-	US$ 373.4 (1994)
Rate of inflation	-	16.1 per cent (1994)
External debt	-	US$ 2.0 billion (1994)
Rate of unemployment	-	11.7 per cent (1994)
Literacy rate	-	5 years and over 98 per cent
	-	Primary Education 54.6 per cent
	-	Secondary 23.3 per cent
	-	Higher 1.3 per cent
Life expectancy	-	63.1 years (male)
	-	69.4 years (female)
Infant mortality	-	34/1,000 (1994 estimate)
Maternal mortality	-	213 to 442 per 100,000 (1991 estimates)
Urban population	-	32.1 per cent
Rural population	-	67.9 per cent

II. GENERAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE

10. Article 1 of the Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana states, inter alia, that Guyana is a democratic, sovereign State. Chapter 2 outlines the principles and bases of the political, economic and social systems of the country and also states that sovereignty belongs to the people, who exercise it through their representatives and the democratic organs established by or under the Constitution. Power is exercised through the legislative, executive and judicial organs of the country.

The Executive

11. Pursuant to chapter 10, article 99 (1) of the Constitution "the executive authority of Guyana shall be vested in the President and, subject to the provisions of this Constitution, may be exercised by him either directly or through officers subordinate to him". However, article 99.2 also provides for Parliament to confer functions on persons or authorities other than the President. There are 11 government ministries which perform the administrative functions.

Legislative organs

12. Legislative powers are vested in the Parliament of the country. Chapter VI of the Constitution provides for the establishment of a Parliament which shall consist of the President and the National Assembly. The National Assembly consists of 65 persons. Article 65 of the Constitution also states that "Parliament may make laws for the peace, order, and good government of Guyana" while article 66 considers the power of Parliament to alter the Constitution.

The Judicature

13. There is a Supreme Court of Judicature which is composed of a Court of Appeal and a High Court. Each Court is a superior court of record and possesses all the powers of such a court (chap. XI, art. 123 (1) and 123 (2) of the Constitution).

Political parties

14. There are two dominant political parties, the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the People's National Congress (PNC). The PPP was the first to be established in 1950. In 1957, general elections were contested by the PPP which then comprised the Jagan and Burnham factions. The PNC was established after a split with the PPP. The United Force (TUF) and the Working People's Alliance (WPA) were established in November 1960 and July 1979 respectively.

15. Fourteen political parties contested the last general elections held on 5 October 1992. The PPP/CIVIC won 53.45 per cent of the votes gaining 28 seats in Parliament while the PNC won 42.31 per cent, gaining 23 seats in Parliament, 2 per cent of the votes went to the WPA while the TUF gained 1.05 per cent. They each have one seat in Parliament.

III. GENERAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK WITHIN WHICH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE PROTECTED

16. In Guyana the High Court of the Supreme Court is the judicial body that has jurisdiction affecting certain human rights. The Constitution of Guyana Act No. 2 of 1980, articles 138-151, protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual. The Judiciary, from the lowest to the highest level, that is the Court of Appeal, is empowered by article 153 of the Constitution to hear such cases as may affect those rights. Article 153 gives a person the right to apply to the High Court, as the Court of First Instance, to hear and determine any application made alleging that the fundamental rights and freedoms of an individual have been violated.

17. Remedies may take the form of awards, court orders, writs and directions as appropriate for the purpose of enforcing or securing the enforcement of any of the provisions of the Covenant on the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual.

18. There is no separate Bill of Rights, nor can the provisions of the Covenant be invoked directly before the courts other than tribunals or administrative authorities. They may, however, be enforced indirectly in so far as they are subsumed in comparable provisions of the Constitution and the Laws of Guyana.

IV. INFORMATION AND PUBLICITY

19. The Government of Guyana, in conjunction with non-governmental organizations, has taken steps to promote public awareness of the rights enshrined in the Covenant. One of these was the establishment of an Inter-Agency Permanent Committee on Human Rights by Cabinet. The Committee comprises the following Agencies: Ministry of Foreign Affairs;

Attorney-General's Chambers; Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security; Ministry of Home Affairs; Ministry of Education and Cultural Development; Ministry of Amerindian Affairs; Representative Body of Religious Organisations; The Guyana Association of Women Lawyers; The Guyana Bar Association; The Guyana Human Rights Association; The Trade Union Congress.

20. There have been workshops and seminars which were organized both by the Government and NGOs. One of the more recent workshops held dealt with the application of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. This workshop was coordinated by several bodies including the Caribbean Initiative on Equality and Non-Discrimination; CEJIL-Caribbean (Centre for Justice and International Law) and the Children Service Unit of the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security. The workshop's aims were to familiarize participants with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, examine laws and programmes and put forward recommendations which would serve to enhance the realization of the rights enshrined in the Convention.

21. Human rights have also featured prominently in His Excellency President Jagan's addresses to public forums nationally and internationally.

22. The Guyana Human Rights Association, an NGO, also organizes workshops and seminars on a regular basis countrywide.